An Alabama Vision for a Brighter Future with Broadband

High capacity broadband telecommunications is a powerful tool that significantly improves quality of life, public safety, and access to economic opportunity for all Alabamians. With adequate funding, good leadership, and a willingness to work together, affordable broadband services can be universally available throughout Alabama. Consumers can choose among multiple broadband technologies to obtain a service with the price and capability that best meets their needs. By extending affordable broadband services to all areas of the state:

- ❖ Quality health services can be available in every local community.
- ❖ Alabama education can better prepare kids and adults for success in the 21st century global economy.
- ❖ Public safety can be improved with better ability to respond to an emergency or disaster.
- ❖ Government can be more accountable and public services delivered more cost effectively.
- ❖ Farms and businesses can compete more effectively and improve profitability.

How Broadband Can Brighten Alabama's Future

Health Services

- ✓ Physician consultation provided over video links.
- ✓ Patient information available to medical teams 24/7.
- ✓ Wireless monitoring of medical conditions at home.
- ✓ Personalized health and wellness counseling available over cell phones.

Education

- ✓ Access world class education through Internet and video.
- ✓ Promote competitiveness with workforce training.
- ✓ College degree programs and life-long learning accessed on-line.
- ✓ Use of the Internet to research the world's cultures.

Public Safety

- ✓ Immediate reliable communication to coordinate emergency response.
- ✓ Access medical and other resources in times of disaster.
- ✓ Video surveillance to reduce criminal activity.
- ✓ Education of prisoners to prevent repeat crimes.

Government

- ✓ Reduce cost of providing public services with on-line billing, paperless reports, wireless meter reading and other reforms.
- ✓ Improve openness and accountability by placing public policies and records on-line.
- ✓ Use of the Internet to facilitate beneficial connections among community organizations.

Farms and Businesses

- ✓ Efficient communication with suppliers and customers around the globe.
- ✓ Improve competitiveness through computer-based production facility monitoring and automation.
- ✓ Access to expert consultation ranging from machine repair to veterinarians.
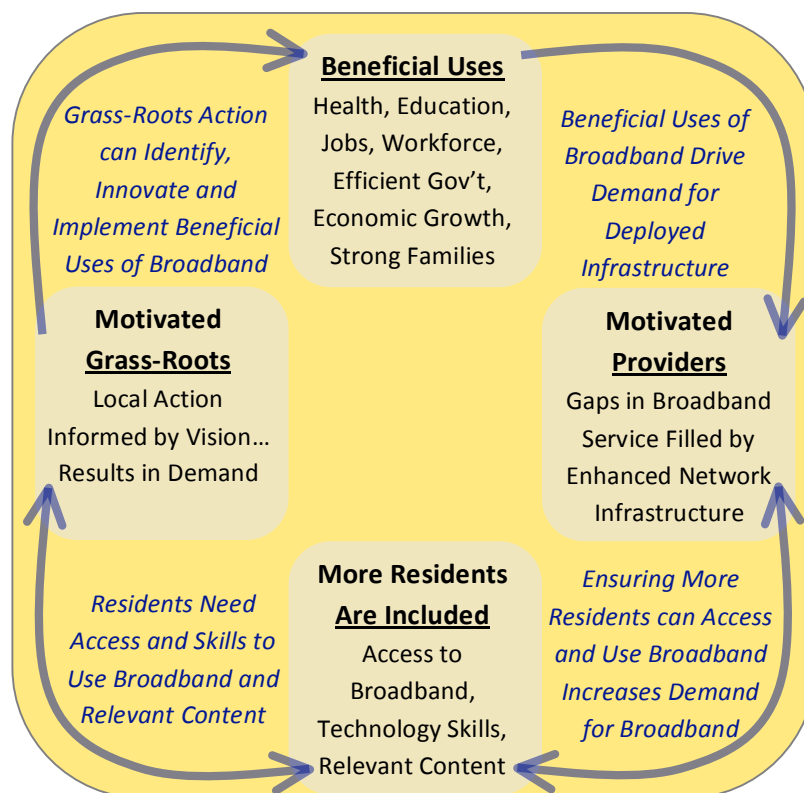- ✓ Market rural locations to tourists.

Transforming Vision into Reality

Alabama is fortunate to have a number of *assets* to leverage for meaningful and positive change through expanded deployment and use of broadband. Examples of several key *assets* include:

- ❖ **Leadership** – Governor Riley along with a long list of champions from both the governmental and private sectors, are champions for broadband communication.
- ❖ **Potential Funding** – Alabama has a realistic possibility of obtaining its fair share of 7.2 billion dollars appropriated by Congress to support expanded deployment and use of broadband communications.
- ❖ **Community Support** – Alabama communities have access to excellenct planning and technical assistance expertise for use by regional planning organizations, state government and higher education.

Alabama's potential for success is impacted by a number of big-picture *driving forces*. To be effective and successful, actions and strategies that involve broadband should consider the following influential *driving forces*:

- ❖ **Consumer Demand** – Greater awareness of potential uses, especially among younger tech-savvy consumers, is intensifying demand for higher speed broadband communications.
- ❖ **Technological Change** – Digital technologies continue to evolve providing consumers with more easy to use options available at a lower cost.
- ❖ **Economic Pressures** – Accelerated by the current global economic recession, there are substantial pressures to encourage more use of digital technologies to lower the cost of providing core public services and improve state and national economic competitiveness.

Grass Roots Action Creating Broadband Demand and Motivating Industry Investment

State-level broadband champions supported by motivated grassroots leadership at the local and regional levels can implement actions to: 1) expand the number of Alabama residents who take advantage of deployed broadband services, and 2) implement new beneficial uses of broadband communications. The result will be an increase in motivation of private industry to invest in the deployment of additional broadband services.

Actions to Expand the Number of Alabamians Taking Advantage of Deployed Broadband

Not all of Alabama's residents have a current option to purchase broadband services. Even among those that do have the opportunity to purchase broadband services, a significant number choose not to make that purchase relying instead on dial-up or no Internet access at all. Possible actions to expand the number of Alabamians who are able to and are motivated to take advantage of deployed broadband services fall into three broad categories:

- ❖ Expand access to broadband services
- ❖ Enhance peoples skills and awareness in using digital technology
- ❖ Promote relevant content

Enhance Digital Skills and Awareness

- ✓ Educate the community on beneficial broadband opportunities.
- ✓ Offer public computer and digital skill training through partnerships with two-year colleges, faith-based and community action organizations.

Promote Relevant Content

- ✓ Provide parents with knowledge and tools to protect children from undesirable content.
- ✓ Develop on-line data bases to support information sharing and regional collaboration.
- ✓ Utilize social networking sites to build understanding and beneficial collaboration among Alabama's rural and urban communities.

Expand Access

- ✓ Apply for available federal broadband grants to help finance the deployment of broadband services in areas lacking broadband options.
- ✓ Ensure regional plans include broadband as critical infrastructure along with energy, sewer, water and transportation.
- ✓ Encourage public sector uses as anchor demand to create incentives for private sector broadband investment.
- ✓ Identify and educate public on bandwidth required to achieve desired broadband uses.
- ✓ Create publicly available computer access locations convenient to the local community.

Actions to Implement New Beneficial Uses of Broadband Communications

For Health

- Engage rural health professionals in creating solutions that address obstacles to e-health.
- Encourage use of information technologies for health and wellness education.
- Support demonstrations of e-health technologies for critical applications such as home-based health care, better mental health services, and drug prevention.

For Education

- Encourage use of video and internet technologies in rural schools to access world class Instructional Resources.
- Expand rural access to life-long learning through two-year and four-year degree programs.
- Utilize video forums to support dialog between educators and business leaders to improve relevance of classroom curriculum for meeting future workforce needs.
- Leverage video and web-media to provide opportunities for youth and adults to gain knowledge of the world's diverse cultures.
- Apply technology to strengthen parental involvement in their children's education.

For Public Safety

- Advance communications system interoperability to strengthen Alabama's disaster response capability.
- Leverage community broadband systems to strengthen local police enforcement.
- Advance community safety through use of broadband enabled technologies to deliver legal services, health care, education and training to prison sites.

For Government Efficiency and Transparency

- Identify and provide training on local government best practices in the use of information technologies to reduce costs of public services and/or improve openness.

- Support local government in identifying and securing grant funds to implement innovations in the use of technologies.

For Economic Development

- Identify regional business sectors with the best potential to successfully demonstrate innovative uses of broadband to support business development.
- Develop strategies to enhance rural business opportunities that leverage advantages provided by broadband communication.
- Assign regional teams to create strategies to expand use of broadband to improve on-farm and industry profitability.